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Subject: Desiring and Choosing.

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A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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DESIRING AND CHOOSING.

"Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."—Heb. XI. 25.

This is a part of that discourse of faith which was illustrated by all the historical instances which were then within the reach of the apostle, and in which were passed in review the greatest names of Hebrew antiquity, the element of faith in each being brought out. And in that whole group of noble souls, though living in the dusk of the earliest day, there was none greater than Moses, of whom this was spoken. Great, he was, by the native stature of his mind—one of the few pre-eminently great minds; one of the four or five men of the world's history, as a leader, as an organizer, as a legislator, as a hero.

His circumstances, you will recollect, were peculiar. Born of a despised race, that then were in captivity in Egypt; doomed to destruction; saved by the shrewdness and love of his mother; adopted, by a most romantic incident, into the family of the reigning house; reared as a prince; educated to the last degree of knowledge that then was attainable; with a mind peculiarly fitted to take on education, he stood apparently upon the threshold of all the things that men most desire in this world. There was nothing that wealth could give that the child of Pharaoh's daughter could not have. There was nothing in position, and nothing in honor, and nothing in government, that was not open to his hand. There was nothing in pleasure that was not accessible to him. Or, if he chose, he could turn aside to "the mysteries," as science and knowledge were then called. Though knowledge was the prerogative of the few—namely, the highest class—yet he belonged to it, and knowledge was his.

Now, under such circumstances, the sense of righteousness, the sense of justice and equity, and the prospect of the future, were more to him than all the treasures of Egypt. And although he would have, if he chose his own people, to ally himself with all that was despicable in slaves; although he would have to bear, at their hands, the utmost indignities; although he was to be a vagabond, driven out; although when the pressure of the government came upon him it would be enough to destroy a score of men; and although he was to wear out

Sunday Evening, March 20, 1870. Lesson: Psa. XLVIII. Hymns (Plymouth Collection): Nos. 907, 1185, 1163.

eighty most laborious years (and being a prophet all this rose up before him)—yet he chose it. That is to say, he *desired* it, he *sought* it, and he *had* it. And so illustrious an instance of choosing you scarcely can select anywhere else, now that we see the whole of it in perspective.

"Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ [showing that Christ was the Jehovah of the Old Testament, and that he was worshipped in the Old Testament dispensation just as we worship him now, though under the national designation of *God*] greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he hath respect unto the recompense of the reward."

Afar off he beheld the ends and final issues, and chose them; and all the circumstances intermediate he accepted as the condition on which he was to receive the fruition of the final reward.

I propose to discourse, to-night, on the *Difference between Desiring and Choosing*; because there are a great many who are snared at that point, and because if we can separate the real nature of choice from all its incidents and accidents, there are some applications that can be made which will be of very great value to those who are honest, and who mean to follow their best light.

Of all the things that have been made in this world, there is nothing so susceptible as man. We are more accustomed to speak of man as a creature of power, producing effects, than in any other way; but if one will narrowly study himself and his fellows, I think he will be still more surprised at their susceptibility to receive impressions.

When we hold a mirror up before any object, it takes instantly both the form and the hue of that object; but it is without any power to change. It is the same mirror, and is unsusceptible to anything but the reflection of the objects that are presented to it.

There are some thirty or forty separate mirrors in the human mind —for every faculty is, as it were, a mirror held up to some side of nature, no one of them taking in everything, but each one of them being adapted to some corresponding element in the great round of creation. There is all that cluster of faculties which we call *the reason*, or *the understanding*, made up of severalties, each particular element of which represents, or stands over against, a line of truth, and is susceptible to it. And all the reason is susceptible to all the kinds of truth which exist in the earth, whether physical, or social, or moral.

Then there are the moral sentiments, of their several kinds, each one of which, as a separate interpreting mirror, throwing away every thing else, selects to itself some particular sphere of truth—the con-

sciene, moral truth; hope, its particular kinds of truth; love, its sorts of truth; beneficence, its varieties of truth.

So, through the whole line, each one of the different faculties—*the susceptibilities*, as they are sometimes called—stands, as it were, over against a province of influences or truths. And it is not for man to determine whether he will be influenced by them or not. He cannot help himself. It is not for me, opening my eye upon color, to say, "I will not perceive color." I cannot help perceiving color. It is not for me, in the presence of sweet music, to say, "I will not be affected by sweet music." It takes care of itself. It affects me without my will. You are so susceptible, and I am so susceptible, that, certain influences being set in motion upon us, there is a side of us on which they strike. And this susceptibility, when it is carried up a certain way, is called *desire*. It culminates in a state in which you begin to want that which comes pleasantly or favorably upon the mind.

Here is an agent created with wondrous subtlety, and put together in a manner extraordinary, as to itself—the body, the mechanism of the physical organization, in all the animated creation. For, although single animals have specialties which surpass man, there is not in the animal kingdom any organization which, in its sum total, is to be compared with man. We cannot fly as the eagle can; but the eagle cannot manipulate as we can. We cannot strike as the lion can; but the lion cannot carve and draw as we can. We are feebler in some things in order to be stronger in others; but the average is transcendently greater in man than in the animal creation. The physical organization is as inferior to the mind, as a casket is to the jewels which it carries. It is the mind, after all, that, being studied, is the most subtle, the richest and the most extraordinary, of all the things which a man can contemplate in this world.

It is no small thing to carry this mind in the midst of God's outward creation—in the glory of the heavens, and the glory of the earth; in fullness of the summers; in the endless variety of things that address themselves to each of the senses, and, through observation or reflection, to the taste and desire. It is a marvellous pilgrimage that a man makes, with such a susceptible mind as his, through the natural kingdom. But in society, all the combinations which men make among themselves, into neighborhoods, or into parties, or into schools, or into philosophies, or into social circles, or into bodies formed for the carrying out of ambitious designs—these things acting upon a sentient human mind, tend to create in it susceptibility and desire past all enumeration. It is no small thing to carry our minds, so sensitive, in the midst of all things that are desirable in life—its praises, its joys, its loves, its tastes, in endless profusion.

In the midst of all the things which address themselves to the eye, and to the ear, and to the tongue, and to the hand, and to the body; in the midst of all the priceless possessions for which men have striven since the earth began—one of the first truths that man finds out, is that he is not large enough to do everything; that every one has to live on a principle of selection. But a principle of selection is a principle of rejection. No man can ever appropriate all the bounties of creation which come providentially within his reach. There is not vitality enough in a man to supply all the faculties, all the time, with the sensibility which enjoyment implies. I have put that to proof.

In traveling abroad, in going through Switzerland, in visiting galleries, in seeking out those rarities of which I had read, and about which I knew much, but which I had never beheld, with good health and pleasing society, I went from day-to-day to the maximum of possibility. I enjoyed until there was no more power in me to enjoy, and stopped long before the sun went down, simply because I was used up. I could carry a pretty good load, for a while; but I frequently had a realizing sense that there was a definite limit to the capacity of a man to carry things, even when they were accessible to him. You may look until your eye ceases to see what you look upon. You may listen until your ear fails to hear the sounds which fall upon it. You may enjoy until the fibre says, "I cannot vibrate any more." And a man thanks sleep at last, as the unnamed and unknown luxury of luxuries.

So it comes to pass that with this susceptibility running through many of faculties, the mind is not large enough nor strong enough even to take in everything that is accessible to it. There are many joys which belong to later stages than the present one in which you stand. They come in regular succession; they are articulated in the way of cause and effect; and if you are to have them, you are to have them just as you have clusters of grapes. First the seed is obtained and planted in the ground. Then it goes through the various periods of maturation. And you cannot anticipate or antecede this regular sequence of development. So it is in human life. There are many things which men, when they hear about them, desire. They want them, but have not got them.

In the first place, there are many things that are at opposite poles, so that if you have some things, you must give other things up. If a man wants to sleep, and wants to be wide awake at the same time, he must choose. He cannot do both—(out of Church!) It is impossible for a man to be asleep, and also to be attentive to what is going on out of sleep.

All through life it is so. Everywhere men choose, and in choosing always refuse, or deny themselves what they desire. They desire one

thing more than another, and are obliged to make a selection. Selection on one side, as I have said, always implies rejection on the other side.

A man may desire all his grounds to be in forest, and at the same time he may desire all his grounds to be arable, so that he can plow and plant. He can have them either way; or, he can put a part under the plow, and a part in forest: but he cannot have them all in forest and all under the plow, at the same time. Though each way may have its advantages, and may be right, he cannot have them both. You can take one or the other, or a part of one, and a part of the other. And there is where choosing comes in. The desire is, "I would like them all forest, and I would like them all field," but you cannot have them all, one or the other at the same time. You must choose; and so you must find out which you desire most, or which, desiring most, you will choose, and take steps to secure.

A man may desire to go to sea, and if he has ever been there, I think he will desire still more to stay on shore; but he cannot do both. If you select one element you reject another, all the way through life.

I make these familiar illustrations to show that in the selection which desire begins to breed in us, we are obliged to take things here or reject things there, because they stand opposed to each other; because they stand in conflict; because they stand in succession. So that if you begin at any one point, and say, "I desire that thing," that thing is only to be reached by given steps. It is not on your level. If you would have it you must ascend. If you desire it enough to take the steps to get to it, then you chose it; but if you do not desire it enough to take the steps to get to it, you do not choose it.

From this brief and familiar exposition of *desiring* you will perhaps make the transition yourself into choosing, out of desire.

I take a little child by the hand, and walk down the street to a shop window, and that child wants the first gay thing it sees, and then it wants the next one, and the next, and the next. It wants them all, and would try to take them all, if it could. I take the child into the shop, and it wants a wheelbarrow, it wants a doll, it wants dresses for the doll, it wants this, that, and the other thing, until its little arms are quite outspanned by the multitude of things that it has, and it cries because it cannot take home everything in the shop. As the child gets a little older, he says, "I want this, and I want this, and I want this;" but the parent says, "Take your choice, my dear. Which will you have?" The child looks wistfully at all the things, and wishes it could have them all; but as it cannot have them all, it finally chooses this; and the selection being made, he gets, and does not get, as the case may be.

When people are still older, the same thing is true. A woman goes out shopping, and wants to procure material for a dress. And oh! to go to that place of bewilderment, Stewart's! You wish to select a comfortable dress, a dress within your means, a dress answering to your circumstances. But oh, that the loom should have made such a provocation to the eyes! There it hangs, oh, so gorgeous! oh, so exquisite! "That is what I want," you say; "but this is what I am going to buy;" and there is a vast problem in that simple expression. You want that; and why do you not buy it? "In the first place, it is beyond my means. I have not the money to pay ten dollars a yard for that, or I would do it in a minute." Have not got it? Why, do you not own twenty times ten dollars? "Oh, yes; I own that amount; but then, I have got to pay it for other things." In other words, you prefer to spend your money for other things. You desire that dress; but all things considered, it is better that you should not pay ten dollars a yard for twenty yards of dress goods. You prefer to pay your rent, or to distribute the money among your children, for their education. You think that on the whole you will get more comfort out of that money if you dispose of it in that way. In other words, though you want the costly dress, you do not feel justified in getting it.

The love of dress is pitiful; but the hunger of the eye is not to be despised. There are other kinds of hunger besides stomachic hunger. Great numbers of people have a love of beauty; and many poor wretches are starving because they have it not, and do not know where to look for it. I pity people who have starvation of the eye.

I remember very well, the bleak and barren rooms that I used to live in. I did not know what ailed me. I could not then tell what I wanted: I know now. It was some æsthetic beauty that I had not, and could not find anywhere.

And there are many people who are damned because they have this appetite for beauty, and do not know how to gratify it properly, and, for the sake of having dress, of having ornaments, of having something pretty to them and attractive to others, sell body and soul, and perish, soul and body!

It is a piteous thing for persons to have such an appetite and have it starved, until they have lost conscience, or ignorantly destroyed themselves, for the sake of it.

Well, now, while you were looking at this exquisite silk, and admiring it, did you *choose* it? No, but you *desired* it. You said, "I want it, but I can not conveniently pay for it, considering the other things that I ought to buy. When I think of the necessities of my husband and my children; when I think of what I must have to keep soul and body together; when I think of the house-rent, and the school bills,

and grocer's bills that are to be paid, I do not feel that I can afford to purchase so expensive a dress as that; and I *choose* not to have it, though I *desire* to have it."

There is no mystery in that. It is a problem that is coming up over and over again every day in persons' lives in this world.

What, then, is it, that a person does when he chooses? Why is it that he sifts the myriad influences that are exerted upon him, appropriating some and rejecting others? There are a thousand things that come in to-day, and there are a thousand things that come in to-morrow, to affect us. Each hour shifts the glass. The world, like a glass, is perpetually turning. We are all the time seeing different combinations. And we learn instinctively to choose from among the things that rise up before us. We have taken the line of our life, and we say, "All that I have must lie parallel with that line. I can not take this or that at pleasure." And our life is a system of selecting and rejecting. In looking around we put our eye on this, or on that, and choose it; and then we follow up that which we have chosen. A desire which is so much a desire that the reason, when it is true to its function, approves it as rational, and that the will applies the means to the end, and that you prefer it, together with all the circumstances which are required for getting it—that is a choice.

Choosing takes, not the thing alone, but the whole apparatus by which it is to be obtained. Choosing is not only desire, but the machinery by which desire becomes reality. Choosing always carries with it something more potential than mere susceptibility. So that when a man says, "I choose such a thing," it is as if he said, "I think that thing to be not only desirable, but more desirable than other things that are inconsistent with it; and so much more desirable, that for its sake I will give them up, and will apply all the forces that are necessary to getting it." Such is choosing.

Now, take the case of Moses. There was the Court of Pharaoh. There was everything that could dazzle the senses; everything that could gratify self-love and self-indulgence. And doubtless these things had their weight with him. And on the other hand, there was in his nature a deep moral want; a sense of humanity, a sense of justice, a sense of truth, a sense of God—for "he endured as seeing him who is invisible." There were those two lines of life—the one, that was calculated to attract and gratify the senses; and the other, that was calculated to attract and gratify the moral nature. They hung balanced, doubtless, in his mind. It was with him probably as it is with every other man who comes to a great choice. He perpended, he oscillated, he finally made his choice, and he stuck to it heroically, as long as he

lived; and he will be forever more transcendently blessed in the kingdom of God's glory above.

We are called to make *choices* perpetually; and we must not confound them with *desires.*

With this general explanation, we may now proceed, with some profit, to various points of application.

1. There are a great many young men and young women who desire very much to be cultivated and educated. They have some genuine tastes. They take pleasure in the finer æsthetic elements. They desire to have an education. And if you were to ask them, "Do you choose to be educated?" they would say, "Certainly, I do choose to be educated." But no, they do not. They *desire* to be educated; but it is one of those desires which everybody is subject to. Myriads and myriads of desires we have which never ripen.

Have you ever noticed what a profusion of apple blossoms there are every spring, and how few apples there are that come from them? There are a million blossoms to a bushel of apples. Just so it is with desires and choices. Men have a million of desires to a bushel of choices. Among all the multitude of desires that men have, there is only here and there one that amounts to a choice.

So that when you say, "I choose to be educated," you are mistaken. You do not *choose* it; you *desire* it—that is all. You have sometimes thought to yourself, "How nice it would be if I could speak the modern languages!" but you did not choose to take the pains to learn the French and German and Spanish. You tried once or twice, and got stuck in the grammar the first thing, and gave up. You desired to be educated, and you put yourself in the hands of a teacher, to be taught the various branches of instruction; you placed yourself in circumstances favorable to learning; but you found that it required self-denial to be educated perfectly; and the moment you were brought to the test of giving up bodily ease, and self-indulgence, and the gay throng, and the drudgery of learning a little to-day, and a little to-morrow, and a little the next day, for weeks, and months, and years, for the sake of gaining an education, you did not choose it. When you saw what such a choice involved, you did not venture upon it. You preferred to put it off till to-morrow, or next week, or next month, or next year, and take the consequences. Your choice was, "Give me present pleasure; give me good prospects in this world; give me something to eat, and something to drink, and something to wear; give me a place where I shall be praised, and where I shall be honored, and I will let intelligence go, and I will pick up what little information I need to get through life with." And so it turns out to be nothing more than a fair dream which so many young persons have in early life, when they say, "I

will be a knowing man." They desire knowledge; but they choose ignorance, or only partial knowledge.

2. There is many a man who desires to be rich; but there are a great many men who do not desire to be rich. I am one of them. I know all about it. But it would not be safe to offer wealth to me. As long as I know that I am not going to have it, I not only do not desire it, but I do not even think about it. I certainly am not going to give my life to obtaining riches. A great many people are poor; they are foreordained to poverty; and they make their calling and election sure in poverty. They say they do not want riches. They despise riches. There is nothing like a wholesome despising of riches among men that cannot get them!

But there are men who do desire to be rich, and make up their minds that they are going to be rich—that is, they say they are, until they begin to find out what it costs. They come down to New York to get rich. It was riches that they talked about at home. That is what they coaxed and persuaded their father and mother to let them come to New York for. They did not want to labor on the farm all their life. They wanted to cut a swath in the world; and the way to do it was with riches.

"But oh! my son, it is such a place of temptation!" "Do you think, mother, that I am such a fool that I do not know enough to resist and overcome temptation?" And so he comes down to the city. He comes to *seek his fortune*, as the saying is. And the first step is to get a place. He gets a place. And when he gets a place, he gets companions. And they are gay fellows. They laugh at him and taunt him because he is so trim and prim and proper. His plain country clothes are as good as he can afford, and he has supposed that they were good enough; but he is laughed into getting finer ones. He must shed his *country skin*. He must do as Romans do, among Romans. And he is drawn into this, that, and the other extravagance. And then, he is not going to shut himself up like a worm in its little cocoon. He must go out and see folks. And there are some folks that ought never to be seen, or that, being seen, ought never to be seen twice. And though he came down to get rich, he cannot resist the temptation to indulge in pleasures; and he wants to be kind and sympathetic; and he is not going to be a niggard; and so he must spend a good deal of money; and if it is not in his own pocket, he finds it convenient to take it out of his master's till. He is called up. "John, you have been very inconstant of late. Unless your habits conform to the rules of the establishment, you will lose your place." And it is not a year before he has lost his place. What is the matter? He has been caught drinking, carousing, and gambling.

This is the young man that came down to the city to be rich; but the moment he found that gaining wealth required self-denial, painstaking industry and integrity; the moment he found that it required that a man should rebuff the tempters on the right and on the left, and hold himself steadily to his purpose, he did not choose riches. He chose self-indulgence; he chose the wine-cup; he chose pleasures; he chose companionship; he chose the present, and let the future take care of itself. And when he came down to that which he had chosen —pleasure and its outcome—he was bankrupt and destroyed.

Oh! the destructions that go on! Oh! the annual waste of the best blood! Why, if men should be carried on purpose, by the hand of the tyrant, to such shambles of execution as they go to of their own accord; if young men were to be put upon such racks as I see them voluntarily bring themselves to, it would be thought to be a most outrageous thing. Sometimes for days and days it seems as though I walked upon graves and in charnel houses. Am not I in the confidence of those who are in trouble? Do they not come to me as to a physician? And do I not see that multitudes of men are on the rack, that they have been there till their brains and their marrow are rotten, and that they have destroyed themselves? Do I not see young men who are wasted by the cup, and by the damnable house of pleasure, and by the strange woman's snare? And do I not know that there have come down, hundreds and thousands of them every year, young men, the sweetest-hearted, the truest in their original nature, and the best-intentioned. And did they choose fortune? Did they choose to be something? No, they only *desired* it. They did not *choose* it. And there is a great difference between desiring a thing, and choosing a thing. A fool can *desire;* but it is a man that *chooses.*

3. There are a great many among you who choose, as you suppose, to so grow up that you shall have an established reputation, and the things which properly belong to a good character. But stop! Are you not using those two words interchangeably, as if they were the equivalents of each other? You want a good character, and you want a good reputation, but there is a great gulf between these two things. There is many a man that has a good character, but has comparatively little reputation. In the long run, and ordinarily, a man's reputation will be as his character is; but for a little while a man may have a bad character and a good reputation, or a good character and a bad reputation. And every young man ought to know exactly what it is that he wants. Is it a reputation that you want? Is life a drama? Are you actors? Do you want a tinselled costume? Or, is life an earnest thing; and do you want realities? There is many a man that wants to be thought wise; but do you want to *be* wise? There is many a

man that wants influence; but do you want *power?*—for influence is nothing but the shadow which power casts. There is many a man that wants to seem high; but do you want to *be* high?

Oh! see what a scrambling there is. See how many there are who think that if they can get their names in the newspapers; if they can get themselves represented in some striking picture or book that is to come out; if they can connect themselves with some little successful enterprise, and get a name for shrewdness; if they can dazzle the imaginations of men, and get folks to think this, that, or the other thing of them, they think they have something substantial; but nothing that a man has is substantial, unless it has roots in himself. All that in you which is simply the reflection of other people's thoughts about you, is a mere shadow; and it avails but little. What *you are* stands by you.

If you are mean, your reputation for generosity will not spare you long. If you are stingy, I do not care what your reputation is, you cannot be so munificent in giving away that the gaunt bones of your stinginess will not stick out. People who give for praise, get what they give for. They get their reward for a while. Our Master, in speaking of those who made long prayers, said, "Verily, they have their reward." Everything gets its reward. Every seed produces its own kind. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Where men seek to build up a reputation without any concern as to their character, it is but a very little time that they decive anybody but their own selves. They do not deceive their fellow-men, nor God, nor the devil.

There are many men who come into life, and begin life, feeling that they desire to have an honorable name. They do *desire* it; but whether they *choose* it or not we can tell when we see how they act. If they are circumspect, vigilant, and self-denying; if they take a high standard; if they steadily press their way up; if they buffet every temptation; if they are really forming themselves on a high model, and are seeking for honor and glory, then we say that they have *chosen* such a name. Otherwise we say that they have merely *desired* it.

4. There are very many persons who desire the happiness which comes from well-doing; and they also desire clandestine enjoyment of evil-doing. My friends, there is nothing in this world which more men are mistaken about than the possibility of being wicked underhandedly, and having good on the top of it. You can make a loaf of cake very heavy, and coat it with sugar, and put ornaments on the top of it, so that it shall look admirable. That is the way many people undertake to make their lives—at the bottom heavy as dough, and on the top covered with sugar. There are men who want to be selfish, and yet want to seem to be benevolent. They want to be mean, and they want

to look and seem as though they were generous as a prince. You cannot do it. You cannot join those two things together.

There are a great many men who want to have a reputation for purity and virtue, while they play with their tongue in secret places. They think that secretiveness can cover out of sight what is disreputable. They think they can do God's work with one hand, and the devil's work with the other hand.

Suppose a man should establish a magazine for grinding charcoal in the first story of his house, while his books and pictures were in the next story. Do you suppose a man can grind charcoal down stairs, and keep things up stairs clean? The charcoal will not go up by the ton, but the impalpable dust will find its way up. The ever-industrious air will carry it thither. Some will go out at the door, some will go up through the windows, and some will get through the crevices, until by-and-by his fine engravings are all smutted, and his books are all grimed, and the ceilings are changing in color, and the man's face is turning from its natural hue. You cannot grind charcoal down-stairs and keep clean up-stairs. But many men are trying that which is just as impossible. Dirty dogs, they are. Miserable, filthy creatures, they are. Wicked, self-indulgent men, they are. They are men who would rather die than have their secret life turned inside out, so that folks could see it. They are men that are not so much afraid of the great day of judgment hereafter as of the great day of judgment now. They would not for all the world have the truth respecting themselves come out. And yet, they think they are moving in the most eminent sphere, that it is all quiet, and that nobody knows anything about it. There never was a greater mistake made than that. You cannot harmonize these two things. "You cannot serve God and Mammon." You cannot obey Christ and Belial. You may have two masters, or twenty, if they all stand in a line; but if one stands aside from another you cannot follow them all. You cannot go in opposite ways. You must choose between them, and take one or the other. And *desiring* is not *choosing*. When men are doing wrong, and they know it, and regret it, as they often do; when wrong puts them into this or that misalliance; when they are filled with shame—which is God's quickener of the conscience; when they come very near the verge of destruction, and are filled with fear; when they come to a sense of their danger, so that they desire to be free from their wickedness, they only *desire* it. They do not *choose* it. If they did choose it, they could break their bonds, and rise up and be free.

When, therefore, a man says, "I want to leave my courses," I wait and see whether he does or not. When a man says, "I want to be a better man; I want no longer to transgress the fundamental canons

of morality; I do not want to be employed in a wrong business, or in a wrong way of conducting a right business," I watch him to see whether it is so.

Ah! my friends, I dare say you *desire* reformation, but you do not *choose* it. You may just as well understand it. It is good for you to know precisely where you stand. Some of your fainter feelings do desire better things; but your stronger feelings take hold of wrong things, and cling to them.

5. Rising from the question of morality to that of spirituality, there are a great many persons, who, all their life long, have the impression that they should be Christians, and mean to be Christians, and hope they shall be. They say, "I respect religion." That plea is often used as an instrument of defence. There are many men who employ it when a clergyman comes along. They say, "I know I am not as good as I ought to be; I am aware that I am not a Christian; but I have the greatest respect for religion and the Church." Perhaps you would not respect the Church so much if you knew all about it—for it is your ignorance, frequently, that leads you to respect it, even as much as you do.

I talk with these persons, and say, "Do you not choose to be a good man?" "Yes; oh yes." "Do you not choose to repent?" "Yes." "And to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?" "Yes." "To rise up into the spirit of communion with him." "Yes." "And to live by faith of Christ, and love to God and man?" "Yes." "And to purify your life with everything that is consistent with the divine will?" "Yes, it is eminently desirable," you say. This, then, is precisely the ground on which you stand: you have the moral sensibility to see that it is desirable, but you have not moral stamina enough to *choose* it.

You prefer the present. You prefer to act in the line of your habits. And there are a great many of you who act against your best impulses. There are men here who believe in conscience, and rectitude, and honor, and acknowledge God to be their Commander and Captain; and yet they do not hesitate to break their promises to him, and violate their duty toward him. Multitudes of men there are, who, toward the divine Being are living in the most open violation of that which toward their fellow men they hold and cherish with their utmost sensibility.

How many, to-night, if I should say, "Do not you desire to be a Christian?" would not say, "Yes, I do desire it." Have you chosen it? are you willing to live for the things that it is necessary to live for? Are you willing to take the steps that it is necessary to take, are you willing to put forth the exertions that must be put forth, if you

are to be a true Christian? It is not enough for you to stand aloof and say, "Oh! that I were only as good a Christian as I think my father was!" It is not enough for you to sit in the gallery and look wistfully down and see the elements of Christ's body broken, and distributed among the people of God, and say, "I would give all the world to be among those persons." No, you would not. There is one little thing in this world that you would not give, and that is your *heart*. I like to see persons up in the gallery during the administration of the Lord's Supper, but I do not like to see them there too often. Stay on communion Sundays, and look at the solemn service, and let it sink deep into your heart; but oh! if you have been stopping once, and twice and thrice, the next time you stop, it should be down below, with those that are partaking of these elements. But for you to come years, and years, and years, as spectators of these things—you know it is not right. You know that while you *desire* to be a Christian, you *choose* to be an enemy of God—a man of the world, without God and without hope.

I will not, with applications, pursue this subject further. I will, in closing, make one or two remarks other than these.

The first is, that we see in the discriminations that have been made, and the illustrations that have been given, the explanation of a vast amount of religious susceptibility which produces very little result in life. We see how it is that men in church are carried up by singing, by prayer, by the present effect of preaching upon their minds, to a point which looks as though it would certainly culminate in true piety, and that then they go home and are as they that look into a glass, and see forms, and then forget what manner of forms they were of. Nothing but susceptibility was exercised in them. There was no moral purpose formed. There was no choice reached. But they think that they are getting better; they flatter themselves that they are real growing Christians, and that they are coming nearer to the Christian life.

There are a great many men here who think that they are sinful out of church, and do not think they are Christians. They *know* they are not Christians; yet they feel that, on the whole, their moral sensibility to some sides of religious influence is increasing. They have a vague impression that they are accumulating treasure. I do not undertake to say that men are not benefitted in many respects under such circumstances. I have seen men that were not gathered in at one revival, but were at the next one; and I have seen persons that went on acquiring more and more susceptibility, and gathering more and more of religious influence, and yet were going further and further from anything like decisiveness of choice, and contenting themselves with what amounted to nothing more than religious revery. They were persons

who took pleasure in thinking vaguely, and thinking at large, on the subject of religion; but they never got further than that. They never came to a decision or choice. And so there are hundreds that go on through life, like the clouds that do not rain in summer. They gather, and promise a shower, and then break, and pass away, and there is not a drop that falls.

I remark, again, that a man's choice may always be known by what he does, rather than by what he says. Therefore let me see what a man's life is, and I know what his choice has been. Whatever a man is, he chose to be—I mean within the bounds of possibility. A man may be poor, and may not be able to change his condition. A man may be short of stature, and not be able to add one cubit to it. But in the department of men's choices, what a man is, is determined by what he does. If you drink, you choose to drink. If you swear, you choose to swear. If you lie, you choose to lie. If you are hard-hearted, you choose to be hard-hearted. If you oppose the ways of virtue, you choose to oppose the ways of virtue. You choose the thing that you do. If, on the whole, you are manly and true, you choose manliness and truth. It is well for a man to analyze his life, to journalize it, to write it down, and let it lie before him. He can then draw his own portrait. This is the more important, because men purposely deceive themselves, and hide from themselves their real preferences and their strongest tendencies.

I remark, once more, that the power of desire increases, and the power of choosing decreases, as men go on through the stages of an unregenerate and wicked life. It is the reverse in a holy life. The power of forming desires into choices increases as a man advances in the Christian life. Whatever he desires within the bounds of possibility he can seek after, and gain, and keep. In the case of men who live out of Christ and out of religion, the opposite takes place. Their desires augment, but their power to choose diminishes. And the want of power to choose is the destruction of thousands, and thousands, and thousands. It is the will-power which men need; it is this central stamina that enables one to choose; and they have enfeebled and wasted it. So that one of the final mischiefs of wickedness in this world, is, that men become *reprobate*. Some persons are opposed to that word; but there is such a thing as a man's going on and perverting himself to so great an extent, morally, that there is not within his reach the means of recuperation. Can you tamper with the eye until you have destroyed its organization? Can you tamper with the tongue, till it ceases to perform its legitimate functions? Can you tamper with the physical structure, till it is unfitted for the offices which it was designed to fulfill? Can you tamper with the intellectual structure till it is all

awry, and reports falsely? So a man can tamper with his tastes, and his affections, and his sensibilities, till they cease to have their normal action. There is many a man that goes on drinking, although he abhors the ditch into which he has fallen. There is many a poor drunken man who covets respectability in those hours when the illusion is dispelled, and there comes a little calm. There are hours in which he bethinks himself again of his earlier and happier days. And I believe that the bitterest prayers which ever go to heaven, are prayers of poor drunkards, in their intervals of remorse for the past, and longing for the future. Why, then, do they not break away from the cup? Because the power of choice is destroyed in them, almost—quite in some instances. For I believe that drunkenness becomes a disease for which a man is totally irresponsible after a while. He has broken down the very mainspring of character. And in such stages as this he should be treated just as the insane are treated. He should be put into an asylum. He should be dealt with as we deal with little children, and those who cannot take care of themselves.

And as it is with intemperance, so it is with other wicked ways. They come to that point where desires are more powerful than choices; and men may go on in them till their power of choosing is shrunk to the minimum, if not entirely destroyed.

This subject is full, not only of instruction, but of warning. Better is the man who lives in a very narrow circle of ideas, but who has the power to form wishes into choices, than the man who lives in a larger experience, but has no power of turning his susceptibilities into preferences, and his preferences into choices. The benefits which you receive do not depend upon how much susceptibility you have, but upon your power to choose them. And if you would measure your manhood, and ascertain the steps along your future course; if you would form a prophecy concerning yourself, measure at that point where desires are converted into choices.

If you choose the life to come, all your present life will be subordinated to that glorious choice, and men will see, and angels will see, and God will see, that you are giving up the pleasures of sense, and of this life, that you may take hold of life eternal. But if you choose this world, with all its risks and perils, God will see, and angels will see, and all men will see, and you yourself will see, that whatever you may have wished, you *chose* the life that now is, and risked, if you did not choose, the destruction of your soul. "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Take this lesson home with you. It is not in my power to convert you. It is not in my power to change you in any way. You must

change yourselves. And if it is difficult now, will it not be more so next year? If it is hard to-night, do not put it off, lest it be impossible next year, or in years to come. "Now is the accepted time." The difficulty to-day of turning from sin to holiness is the measure of the necessity—the *instant* necessity—for your doing so.

May God give you wisdom to emulate him of old, who *chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, and esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, and had respect unto the recompense of the reward, and endured to the end, and was gloriously saved.*

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

Thou blessed God, lifted up above all human calamity, above weakness, above thought of sorrow, thou art the most merciful and the most condescending. And all that we see among men of tenderness and of kindness is something of thee. Thou art the source of pity and compassion. With thee is mercy. It dwells with thee, and was born in thee. And all things that are to be desired in thought and in feeling are of God. We rejoice that there is not lifted into everlasting power any hard and compelling dynasty without pity. Thou that art eternal love dost dwell in the centre; and above all power is thy power; above all wisdom is thy wisdom; and everywhere, in heaven and upon earth, thou art moving all things toward beneficence. Thou art bringing all causes to work together for good. Thou art filling the earth, little by little, with righteousness. And though thy delay seems to us long, it is because our lives are short, whilst thou dost dwell in eternity, and to thee things move fast, though ages seem to intervene between the beginnings and the ends. And thou art content, and art pressing forward the grandeur and glory of thy kingdom. It shall yet open and grow more gloriously than we have dreamed. And we shall discern it. As aforetime, holy men desired to see, and died without the sight, so we, in the consummation of things, discerning the beginnings of the blossom and of the fruit, long to behold the millennial fullness, and shall not see it from earth; but in more glorious vision, with cleansed eyes, and clear and steadfast hearts, we shall behold, from the other side, the ends, and all the glories of immortality.

And now we desire to be on that side in the struggle. We, too, have our own battle. Every one of us has his contest to fight. Give to us brave hearts. Give to us firm purposes. May we meet every adversary undauntedly, and stand to our duty. We are thine. We belong to thee. May we be ashamed to withhold from our lawful Master his just due. And since thou art not Master as much as Father; since thou art Lover as well as Judge and Commander, grant that we may with more willingness and alacrity perform every duty to thee.

Lord, we beseech of thee that we may be faithful according to our light; according to our consciences. May we not put away the things which are unpleasant. May we give ourselves manfully, and with all our heart, to the right way, that we may walk therein, and continue therein, and that we

may draw others with us, until at last we may all stand in Zion and before God.

Oh! pity the infirm. Pity those that are wistful, but are not resolved. Pity those who look from afar, and wait for help, and find it not. Pity all those who, without thy power, and without human help inspired of thee, most miserably perish. Lord, gather them, we beseech of thee. Fill our hearts with earnest desire. May there be more and more who shall labor for men's souls. Behold how great is the waste. Things are perishing on every side; but nothing so much as man. What waste there is in all creation! But nowhere is waste so piteous, so needless, and so wide-spread as among men. Pluck them, we beseech of thee, from their dissipations, and from their intemperance, and from their lust for greed, and from their striving, and from cruelties, and from immoralities, and from dishonesties and frauds, from vanity, and conceit, and pride, from hard-heartedness and worldly-mindedness, from every iniquity. Bring them, we beseech of thee, into the sweet realm of purity and love, into fidelity and worship, that they may love God and love man, and be saved.

And we pray for the outpouring of thy spirit in more copious effusion from church to church. Come forth, O Prince of the Soul! Know thine own, and call them with an effectual calling, and bring home many sons and daughters to thyself in this great city.

And we pray that thy word may be preached with more power and fidelity in all the churches of our land. Cleanse the morals of this people. Set up thy standard everywhere. And to its bright light may there come trooping innumerable souls. We pray that thou wilt overturn and overturn until he whose right it is shall come and reign.

And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son and Spirit, ever more. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON

Our Father, we pray that thou wilt grant thy blessing to rest upon the word of admonition and instruction. We pray that it may give light to the understanding, and warning to those who are in peril, and caution to us all. May we examine ourselves to know how much we are living upon merely a vague and profitless desire, and how much we are building ourselves up by choices. Grant that we may choose not only the name of Christ and his service, but his spirit; and every day more and more. And may we convert all our tastes and all our susceptibilities into those choices which shall make us men in Christ Jesus. Go with any who desire more knowledge and light. Open their understandings. Fill them with light by thy good Spirit. If there be any who are inquiring their way to thee, bring them to a knowledge of Christ Jesus. And we pray that there may be many born into the kingdom, and that all our places may be filled with the sons of those that are ransomed and rejoicing in the Lord. And to thy name shall be the praise, Father, Son and Spirit. *Amen.*

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